

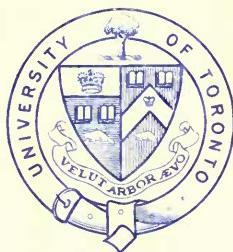
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The Beethoven Museum at
Bonn

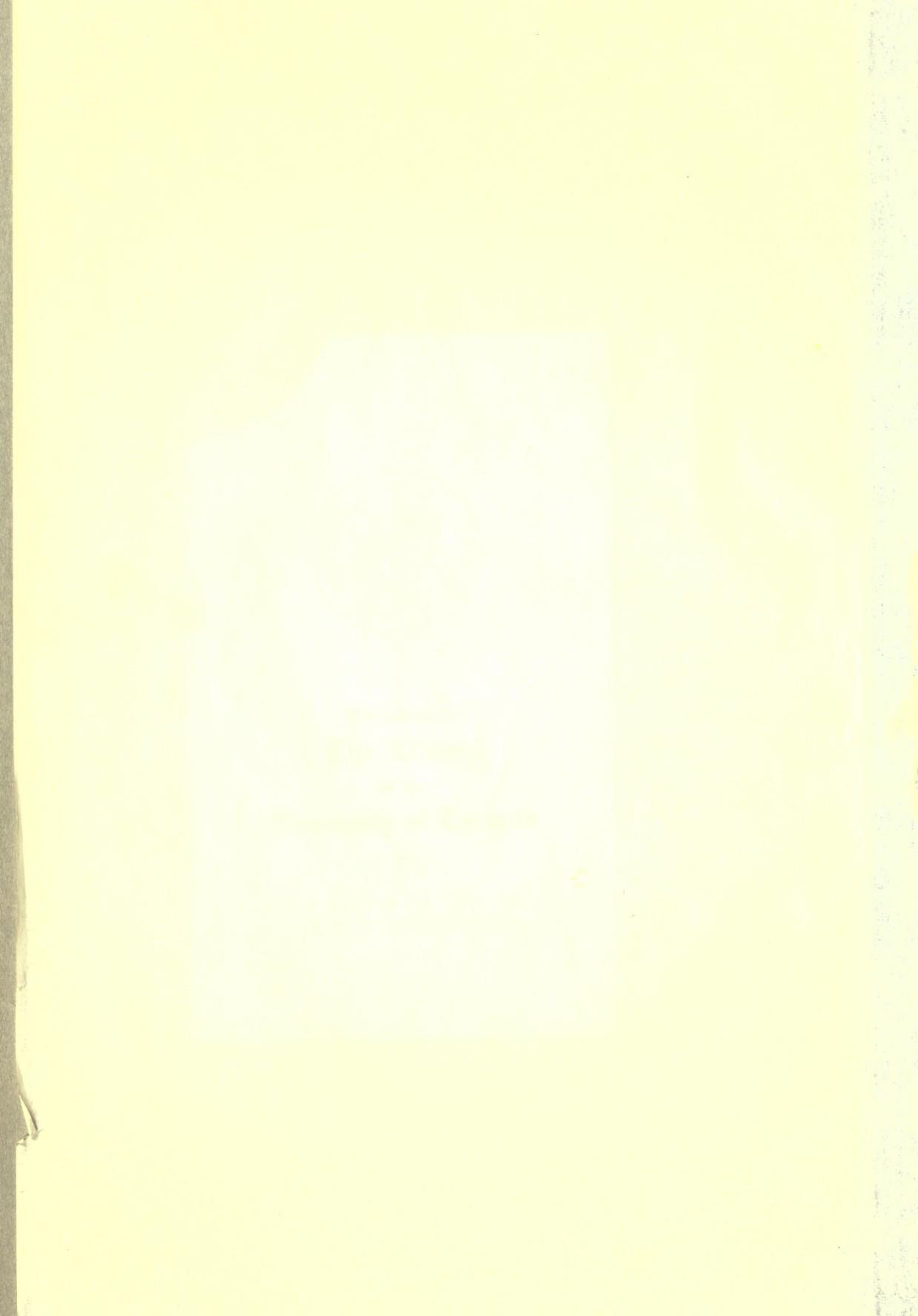
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THE CENTURY MAGAZINE

VOL. LVI.

MAY, 1898.

No. 1.



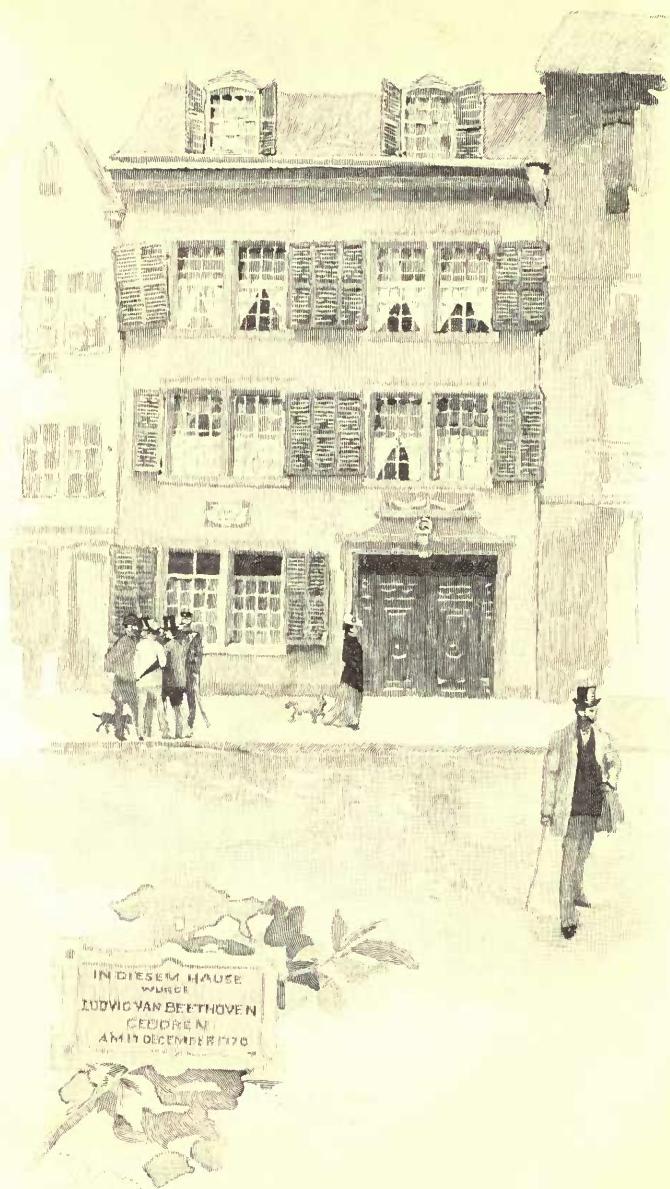
THE BEETHOVEN MUSEUM AT BONN.

BY H. E. KREHBIEL.

WITH PICTURES BY LOUIS LOEB.

A MUSICAL student cannot visit the Beethoven Museum at Bonn without thinking of Alexander W. Thayer. It is almost as much a monument to the distinguished biographer as to the incomparable genius. Without Thayer's labors, indeed, it is doubtful if the museum would ever have come into being. More than anything else, the discoveries which he made touching the antecedents of Beethoven and the musical affairs of the Electoral Court helped to stir up that feeling of local patriotism in a small coterie of art-loving citizens in Bonn which culminated, ten years ago, in the purchase of the house in which the composer was born, its preservation from ruin, rescue from degradation, and dedication to the admirable purpose to which it is henceforth—let us hope *in secula seculorum*—to be devoted. It is singular, in view of the large infusion of sentiment in the German nature, that so long a time was permitted to elapse between the death of Beethoven and the taking of these wise and pious steps. But everything is singular which concerns Beethoven. There are singular lies in most of the books that have been written

about him, and even more singular truths. On his death-bed a print of the house in which Haydn was born was placed in the hands of the Titan. "Look, my dear Hummel," said he to the friend who stood at his bedside; "the birthplace of Haydn! I received it today as a gift, and it has given me a great pleasure. A wretched peasant's hut in which so great a man was born!" Did his thoughts go back to the lowly walls which echoed his own infant cries? No one can know. He died and gave no sign. It is even doubtful if he would have been able, had he been asked, to settle a dispute like that which broke out, ten years after his death, concerning which of four houses was the one in which he was born. His parents had occupied lodgings in three houses before he was six years old. He had gone away from Bonn when he was twenty-two, and he never went back. There were no domestic ties to recall him. The fulfilment of his manifest destiny required that he should live in Vienna, whither he had been sent by his master, the Elector of Cologne, who was an archduke of Austria and the youngest son of Maria Theresa.



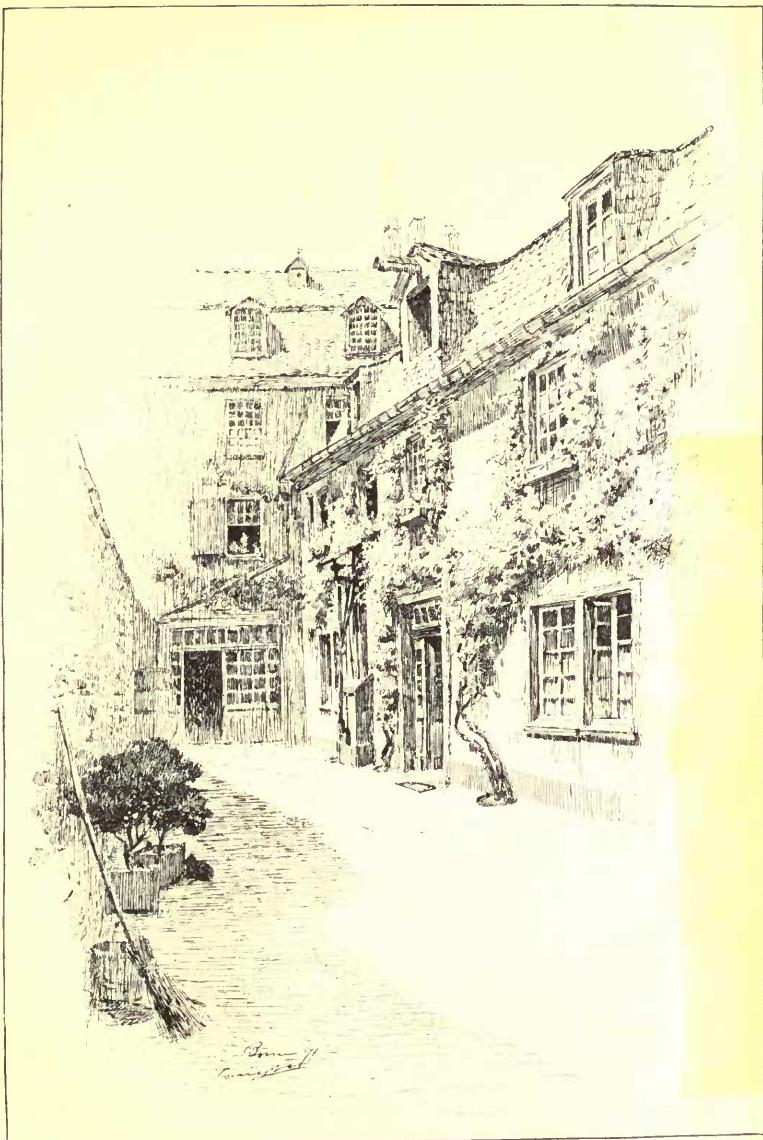
ENGRAVED BY E. H. DE L'ORME.

BEETHOVEN'S BIRTHPLACE.

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Bonn forgot him until he was dead; or if it did not quite forget him, it was too much concerned with its own petty affairs to remember which of its houses had held the cradle of its greatest son. Only slowly did there

volumes of Mr. Thayer's wonderful biography have been printed—the first in 1866, the second in 1872, the third in 1879. A fourth, the concluding volume, was left unfinished—barely begun, indeed—when the



THE COURTYARD, BEETHOVEN'S BIRTHPLACE.

dawn on the city's obtuse perceptions a realization of the share which it had in the glory created by his genius. The realization never became full and perfect until the American admirer of that genius crossed the ocean and took up the task of writing the life-story of Beethoven, the man. That was over forty-five years ago—nearly half a century. Three

author died in 1897. Mr. Thayer's aims and methods were unique even to the plodding and studious Germans among whom he had lived so long. The volumes have been published only in German translation, and this is partly the reason why in England and America the popular conceptions of the man Beethoven are still those created by the

THE CENTURY MAGAZINE.



BEETHOVEN AS A YOUNG MAN.

biographies that were written half a century ago.

I have intimated that it is to Thayer that Bonn is indebted chiefly for knowledge of the part it played in the life-story of Beethoven. It was the confessed purpose of the biographer to strip from his subject a mass of traditional fiction, and he has done so; but he has supplied its place with an integument of romance a hundredfold more interesting and instructive. He has recognized that it is not enough that we interest ourselves in the facts of the artist's outward life from mere affectionate curiosity concerning his personality; the scientific spirit of the times requires that the primary purpose be to study the influences that shaped his thoughts, inspired his feelings, and prompted his manner of expression. To those who wish to trace the operations of the law of heredity, and to find long and cumulative trains of causes for each effect, Mr. Thayer's researches are invaluable. Grandfather, father, and son, the Beethovens were in the active service of the Electoral Court in Bonn for sixty years. Thayer's earliest inquiries begin with the career of the Elector Joseph Clemens, the predecessor of Elector Clemens Augustus, under whom the grandfather of the composer entered the Electoral Chapel. They embrace the personal and artistic character of these potentates with the special purpose of showing what were the social and artistic influences exerted by them in the capital of their political and religious empire. His examination of the court archives at Düsseldorf and Bonn revealed a number of documents which enable us to reconstruct a perfect picture of the art-life of the city for three quarters of a century. The open-

ing of the museum in 1890 was made the occasion of an exhibition of these documents and a large collection of Beethoven relics from all over Germany. The whole partook of the character of a series of illustrations to Thayer's book. As a rule, museums in which relics of the great men of the earth are preserved are little else than curiosity-shops which provide entertainment for sentimental misses and hero-worshippers. The Beethoven Museum is of a different sort. As the complement of Thayer's book, it is a contribution of vast significance to the history of the composer, which, by direct instruction, and through suggestion, teaches a multitude of things concerning the man and his art which cannot be learned elsewhere. The correctness of this proposition is demonstrated in the story of the house itself. Beethoven was dead nearly twenty years before the antiquaries of his native town had settled the controversy touching which of several houses was the one in which he had first seen the light. This fact determined, more than a quarter of a century was permitted to go by before there was what might be called an official recognition of the results of the controversy. When Beethoven died, in 1827, there were four houses in Bonn



A CORNER OF THE GARDEN.



ENGRAVED BY E. HEINEMANN.

BEETHOVEN'S MOTHER, AFTER A PAINTING BY CASPAR BENEDICT BECKENKAMP.

D^r. Joannes van D^r. Lodewij^s Palmini
Bouwys ijnsel lig^t bij D^r. Lodewij^s Palmini
Beethoven. 3 Helena Lodewij^s von Beethoven &
Levericht conuges gertruid in allen
D^rta Bouws.

THE RECORD OF BEETHOVEN'S BIRTH.

each of which was thought by some persons to be the birthplace of the master. It required but little investigation, however, to narrow the question to two houses: that in the Rheingasse, near the

died. It was chiefly due to Dr. Wegeler, one of the friends of Beethoven's youth, that the truth was established that the Beethoven family were living in the Bonngasse in 1770. The controversy which had been provoked



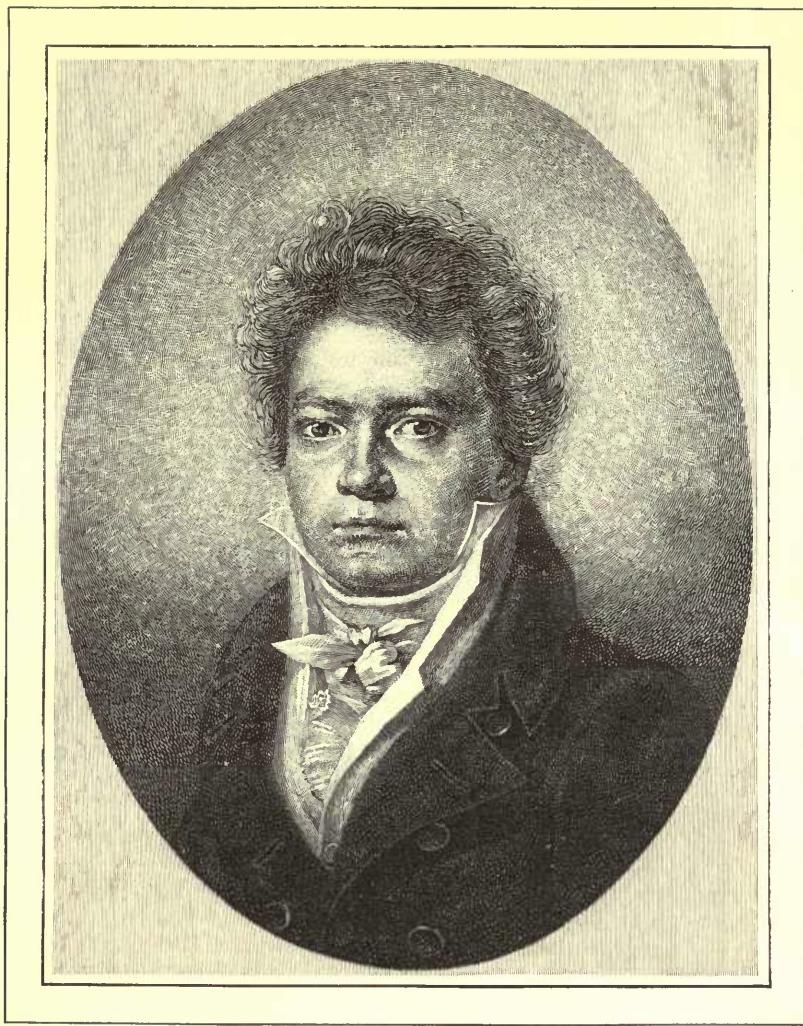
ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN IN HIS THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR.

Portrait by W. F. Müller, after a copy in the possession of Mrs. Jabez Fox,
Cambridge, Massachusetts.

river, No. 934 (it has since been demolished, and the house which is still occasionally shown to visitors as Beethoven's birth-house is a new one on the old site), and that in the Bonngasse (old number, 515; new number, 20), near the market-place. The former house was generally accepted as the true one for more than a decade after Beethoven

by a review of Wegeler's "Biographical Notices" was summarized by the secretary of the committee under whose auspices, in 1845, the Beethoven monument was placed in the Münster Platz; but, despite the magnitude of the celebration which attended the unveiling of the statue, no steps were taken to mark the house. The tablet now to be seen



ENGRAVED BY R. A. MULLER, AFTER A DRAWING BY LOUIS LATRONNE IN 1812.

Ludwig van Beethoven



FRAGMENT OF THE FINALE OF THE CHORAL SYMPHONY.



ENGRAVED BY R. C. COLLINS.
BEETHOVEN'S PRACTICE PIANO.

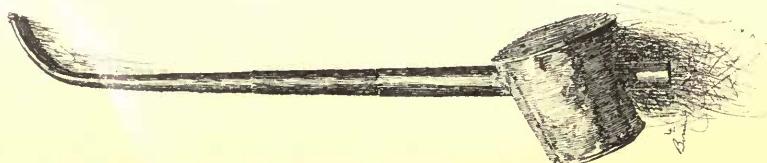
upon its front was not affixed until 1870, the centenary of Beethoven's birth. As late as 1886, I was invited, by an occupant of the house which now stands on the old site in the Rheingasse, to enter and inspect the room in which Beethoven was born. The old tradition, maintained by the thrifty desire to earn a *Trinkgeld*, died hard; but it received its quietus when the house in the Bonngasse was bought for about fourteen thousand dollars by the Verein Beethoven-Haus, in 1889, and the lying tablet on the house in the Rheingasse was removed to make place for one bearing an inscription in harmony with the facts.

For nearly one hundred years after Beethoven left Bonn the house in which he was born was permitted to remain private property, and no steps were taken to protect it against ignoble uses. The house was for a time used as a beer-shop, and in the little rear garden the owner built a sort of summer-house, in which he gave concerts of a low order.

The windows of the garret room in which was born the greatest tone-poet that the world has produced (the family occupied only

the rear portion of the building) looked out on what the Germans call a *Tingel-tangel*. To make the degradation of the spot complete, the manager was wont to advertise his concerts as taking place "in the house in which Beethoven was born." The last program containing this announcement is one of the curious possessions of the museum. The house having been bought, the concert-saloon, and the show-windows which had been built into the street front, and all other additions which were known to be made in this century, were removed, the old aspect of the garden was restored, and a wooden pair of stairs was replaced by the original stairs with wrought-iron rail, which had, luckily, been stowed away in a store-room. The floors, doors, and ceilings in the rear house were thought to be original, and were left unchanged beyond necessary repairs. Every bit of wood of which it could reasonably be believed that it was part of the house in the time of Beethoven was piously preserved; and Mr. William Kuppe, a musician largely instrumental in calling the enterprise into existence, told me, with much amusement, of the suspicions touching his mental condition which he aroused in the minds of the workmen when he carefully wrapped the threshold of the birth-room in paper, carried the well-worn, worm-eaten piece of wood away till the work of renovation was finished, and then insisted upon its being replaced. In May, 1890, the museum was opened to the public, with the exhibition of relics already mentioned, and a festival of Beethoven's chamber-music, in which the chief performer was Joseph Joachim, the honorary president of the society.

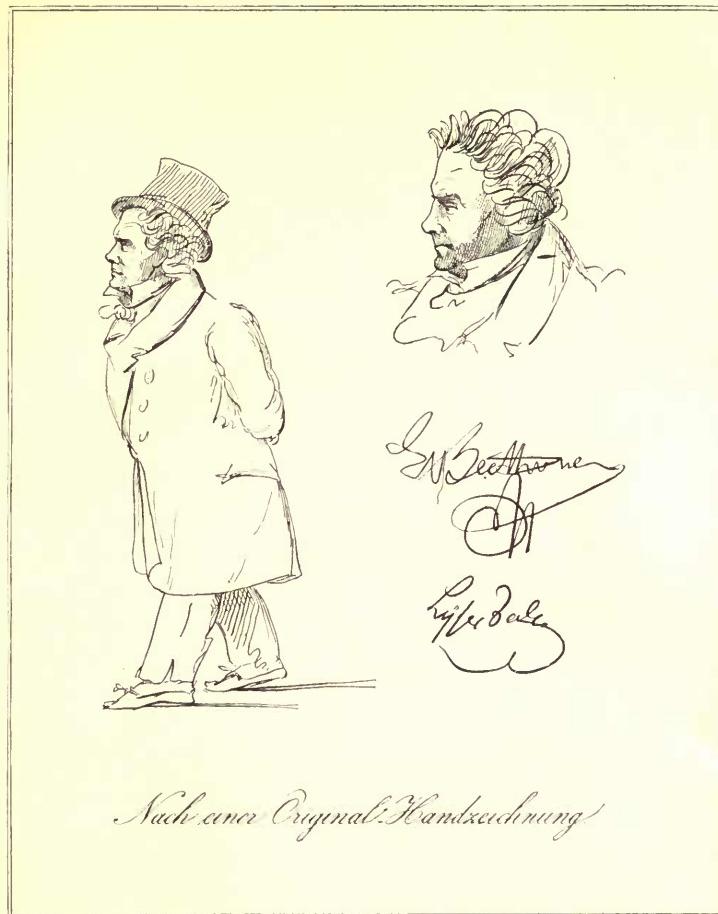
Of the articles exhibited at that time, many have remained in the possession of the society. It is my purpose to speak only of a few of them, which serve markedly to illustrate the educational value of the institution. Prominent among these is the portrait of the mother of the composer, which was never publicly exhibited before 1890, though for a long time before that date in the possession of a collector of Bonn. Belief in its authenticity is based chiefly on an uninterrupted



ONE OF BEETHOVEN'S EAR-TRUMPETS.

tradition reaching back through the century, and its correspondence with the description of her personal appearance in the Fischer manuscript: "Stature of Madame van Beethoven rather large; longish face; nose a little bent; spare; earnest eyes." She was a native of Ehrenbreitstein, and her father was chief cook in the service of Caspar Wenzelaus, the Elector of Treves.

See page 7.). Before she was seventeen, she was married to Johann Laym, a servant of the Elector of Treves, who left her a widow before she was twenty. She was married to Johann van Beethoven, tenor singer in the chapel of the Elector of Cologne, at Bonn, on November 12, 1767, at the age of twenty-one, and died of consumption at the age of forty-one. Her last sickness hastened the



SKETCHES OF BEETHOVEN BY LYSER.

It is said that the cause of Beethoven's deafness was an inherited disorder. If this be so, the study of the social influences which went out from a court morally corrupt in spite of its ecclesiastical character, made possible by Thayer's investigations, serves to throw into higher relief the nobility of his character, the chastity of his mind, and the purity of his life. It also accounts for his lifelong reverence and love for the memory of his grandfather, and for that of his sweet, patient, suffering mother. Her maiden name was Maria Magdalena Keverich ("Helena" in the certificate of Beethoven's birth.

return of Beethoven from his visit to Vienna in 1787. The portrait of her in the museum is supposed to be the work of Caspar Benedict Beckenkamp, also a native of Ehrenbreitstein, and, like the chief cook Keverich, also in the service of the Elector of Treves. The portrait of Beethoven's mother, assuming it to be such, is the most valuable contribution which the museum has made to this branch of Beethoveniana. It has a rival in interest, however, in the picture of the Countess Brunswick. This has long been known to the cognoscenti, but it has acquired a new and special value of late years from

the fact that investigators, acting on a hint thrown out by Thayer, have at last identified the countess as the "immortal beloved" of the passionate love-letters by Beethoven, long but falsely believed to have been written to the Countess Guicciardi. There can now be little doubt that the Countess Brunswick was the other party to the mysterious betrothal of which so much has been written.

The collection of over a hundred paintings, prints, casts, etc., of Beethoven now in the museum serve a double purpose by directing attention at once to the few authentic portraits of the composer in existence, and to the wideness and wildness of the flights in which artistic fancy has indulged in trying to produce his counterfeit presentment. There are exceedingly few pictures in existence which were made in Beethoven's youth and early manhood. It was only after he became famous in Vienna that artists were eager to paint him, and he was to the end uncontrollable in the matter of sittings. The only full and fair opportunity which he ever gave to a good artist was in 1814, when he agreed to sit a few times to enable Blasius Höfel to correct some defects in the pencil-drawing made two years before by Latronne, a French artist. This drawing was engraved on copper for the publisher Artaria. Beethoven sat in pose for about five minutes, then rushed to his pianoforte, and began improvising. The poor engraver was at his wit's end, but was relieved of his embarrassment by the composer's servant, who told him to take a position near the instrument, and work as long as he pleased, as Beethoven had entirely forgotten him, and did not know that any one was in the room. Höfel took the advice, and made so much progress with his plate that its completion required only two more sittings of less than an hour each. He left

the room without the knowledge of the composer. Beethoven esteemed this portrait highly, and in 1815 sent a copy of it to his friend Wegeler in Bonn. Though it is generally catalogued as the portrait of 1812, since it was in that year that Latronne's drawing was made, I have chosen, in view of the incident just narrated, to set it down as a representation of Beethoven in 1814, in his forty-fourth year, taking the date of the engraving as a guide. Its excellence is strongly confirmed by comparison with the cast of Beethoven's face made in 1812 by Franz Klein, a Viennese sculptor. All the strong characteristics of the mask are reproduced

in the engraving,—the magnificently rounded forehead, broad cheek-bones, unlovely nose, and unyielding mouth,—though, it must be confessed, with some loss in ruggedness. In the mask made by Danhauser two days after death, the marks of the mutilations made by the surgeons for the purposes of the autopsy—the organs of hearing having been removed in the hope of learning the cause of his deafness—are too evident to make contemplation anything but sorrowful. The tiny silhouette which holds a place of honor in the museum, and is comparatively little known,

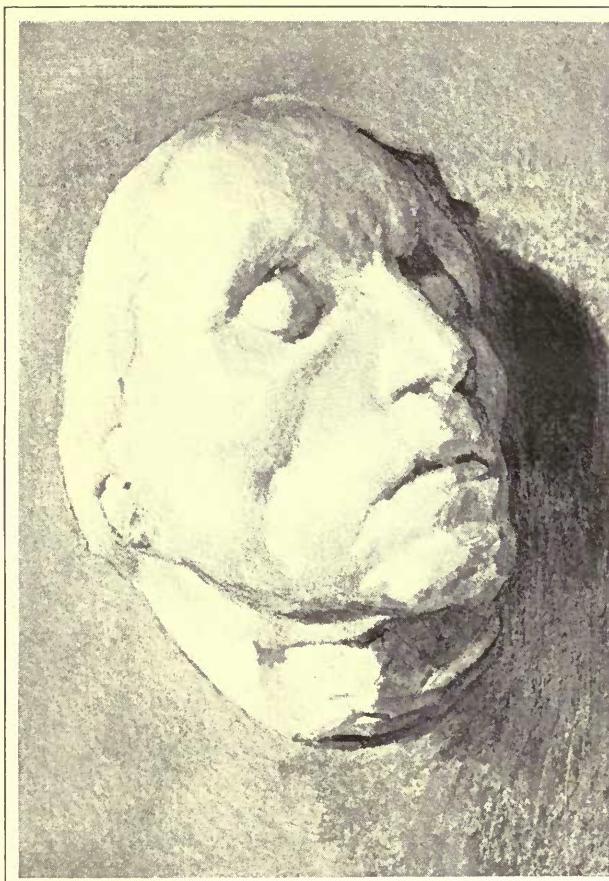


THE LIFE-MASK OF BEETHOVEN.

is not only the earliest of all Beethoven portraits, but the only one of unquestioned authenticity dating back to the Bonn period. It shows him in court dress, periuke, and ruff, as he appeared when on duty as member of the Electoral Chapel. It was made in 1789 or 1790, by a painter named Neesen, in the house of the Von Breuning family, where Beethoven was a frequent visitor before he went to Vienna. The house is now the home of Hermann Neusser, one of the founders of the Verein Beethoven-Haus. The singularly youthful aspect of the features shown in the silhouette is to me inexplicable. Beethoven was at the

time eighteen or nineteen years old. In the familiar pen-sketch by the painter and novelist Lyser, Beethoven's contemporaries were wont to praise the correctness of the attitude and carriage. This judgment now finds confirmation in the memoirs of Gottfried Fischer, which mention the fact that already, as a lad, Beethoven bent forward when walking. The uncontested genuineness of the

help of which he strove so long and so hopelessly to remain in communion with the world of sound. The pianoforte was specially made for him by Graf of Vienna. Its peculiarity is that through the greater part of its compass it has four unisonal strings for each key. So long as he could be made to hear a tone, Beethoven improvised upon this instrument; but under what distressful circumstances!



THE DEATH-MASK OF BEETHOVEN.

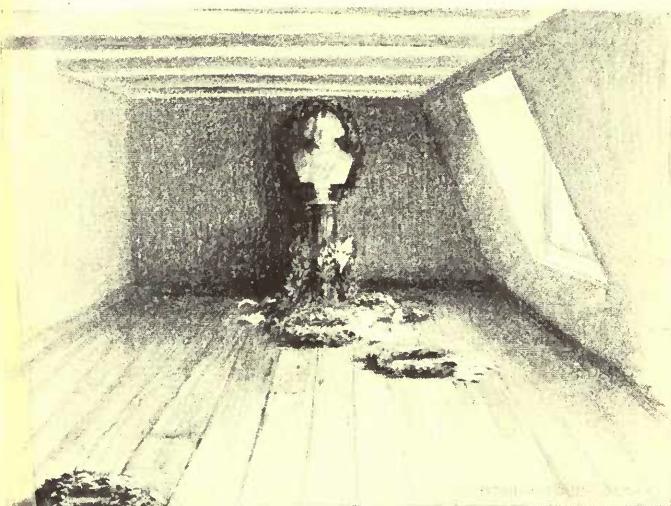
portrait of 1808, painted by W. F. Mähler, an amateur, is its chief commendation. The original hung in Beethoven's room till his death, and then went into the possession of the widow of his nephew Carl.

For seventy-five years the world has tried to solve the riddle propounded by an inscrutable Providence when it permitted Beethoven to become deaf. Among the objects in the museum are those most pitiful memorials of the physical calamity which overtook the man and musician Beethoven—the ear-trumpets and pianoforte with the

Maelzel, the mechanician who invented and made the ear-trumpets for him, built a resonator for the pianoforte. It was somewhat in the shape of the prompters' boxes employed in the theaters of Germany, and was placed on the instrument so that it covered a portion of the sounding-board and projected over the keys. Seated before the pianoforte, his head all but inside the wooden shell, one of the ear-trumpets held in place by an encircling brass band, Beethoven would pound upon the keys till the strings jangled discordantly with the influence of the per-

cussion, or flew asunder with shrieks as of mortal despair. Though the ear-trumpets had been useless for five years, they remained in Beethoven's study till his death. Then they found their way into the Royal Library at Berlin, where they remained until Emperor William II presented them to the museum. The smallest one was used by Beethoven oftenest and for the longest time. The instruments were made for Beethoven by Maelzel at the time when the two were contemplating a visit to London. The inventor intended to exhibit his panharmonicon; and Beethoven composed for it the descriptive work called "Wellington's Victory," in imitation of the battle-pieces which were at the height of their popularity then, and still

maintain themselves on and beyond the periphery of our musical communities. The projected tour was never made, and the scheme ended in a quarrel and lawsuit, for which the blame was thrown on Maelzel, though the fault was the composer's. A year before Beethoven died, Maelzel came to America, where he remained until his death in 1838. Here, as in Europe, he depended for a livelihood on exhibitions of his mechanical contrivances; and though the biographers down to Thayer have maligned his character, he left an excellent reputation, especially in Philadelphia, where he lived longest. One of his masterpieces of mechanism was a forerunner of Ajoub, the chess-playing automaton.



THE GARRET ROOM IN WHICH BEETHOVEN WAS BORN.

MAY ON THE MARSHES.

BY J. RUSSELL TAYLOR.

GILDED with buttercups, with frost of white
Wild lilies-of-the-valley, the marshy green
Glimmered with blue-flags countless all between
Me and the brimming stream's long line of light.
And all the sweet air laughed as to a sprite,
And danced and rained with music crystalline,
With trilled and tittering melody, faint and keen,
Where in the flags the marsh-wren woke delight—
Delight to break my heart: for when I turned
To meet your dark-eyed smile, to see your face
Reflect the light wherewith the sunset burned,
Only the dark-eyed flags smiled up at me,
Only the green was touched with golden grace,
And only the marsh-wren thrilled my tears to see.



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